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SUBJECT: GUIDANCE: U.S. APPROACH TO THE MILLENNIUM
DEVELOPMENT GOALS

ALSO FOR USAID MISSIONS

NSC FOR KARA MCDONALD

¶1. This cable is an action request for USUN (see para. 12) and is intended as a brief overview of current U.S. policy for other posts. More guidance is available on the State/IO Bureau intranet website (see para. 13).

¶2. Summary. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have gained increased prominence in international conferences and events. Posts can expect interlocutors to raise in the context of the UN General Assembly, and some may seek U.S. participation in various fora to highlight specific MDG goals. The U.S. supports completing certain time-bound "core" goals in the Millennium Declaration, but does not utilize the UN's MDG "Road Map" or its performance indicators. We strongly support the original goals set out in the Millennium Declaration and are working hard to achieve them globally, by supporting states that take ownership of their own development and incorporate the MDGs into their national development strategies. Our policy differs from others on how best to achieve the MDGs by putting less emphasis on official development assistance as the path to countries achieving the MDGs and more emphasis on the importance of national leadership and good governance in development; by establishing a pro-growth economic policy; investing in people; and by addressing the obstacles of fragile and failing states. End summary.

MDGs - Center of Development Debate

¶2. A number of international conferences and high-level events are touching on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In addition, some states (the U.K., Denmark) are drawing attention to their unique agendas for achieving certain goals. The goals cover a number of policy areas where the U.S. has existing development programs. In these fora we are proactively explaining our approach to development and the MDGs.

What The MDGs Are and What They Are Not

¶3. The MDGs are the internationally agreed goals in the Millennium Declaration, signed in 2000. The U.S. focuses on contributing towards achieving certain time-bound "core" goals in the Declaration:

-- To halve, by the year 2015, the proportion of the world's people whose income is less than one dollar a day

and the proportion of people who suffer from hunger and, by the same date, to halve the proportion of people who are unable to reach or to afford safe drinking water.

-- To ensure that, by the same date, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling and that girls and boys will have equal access to all levels of education.

-- By the same date, to have reduced maternal mortality by three quarters, and under-five child mortality by two thirds, of their current rates.

-- To have, by then, halted, and begun to reverse, the spread of HIV/AIDS, the scourge of malaria and other major diseases that afflict humanity.

-- To provide special assistance to children orphaned by HIV/AIDS.

-- By 2020, to have achieved a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers as proposed in the "Cities Without Slums" initiative.

Since 2000, however, the goals have been modified and repackaged by the UN into a "Road Map" in an attempt to give states a framework for achieving them and reporting

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on their progress. As of today, the Road Map contains a combination of numbered goals taken from the Millennium Declaration and the 2005 World Summit Outcome document.

¶4. The UN Road Map says that all of the goals in it are time-bound, although some of the original goals the UN drew upon are not. The Road Map also contains "performance indicators," which are supposed to measure progress towards achieving the goals, not become goals in themselves.

¶5. It is important to emphasize that the goals measure global progress towards certain objectives. They do not by themselves represent a comprehensive development strategy, as some assert or imply. However, they may overlap with or be incorporated into national development strategies.

U.S. Perspective on the MDGs

¶6. The Millennium Declaration is a landmark document because it united every country in the world to work to achieve some simple objectives in a time-bound manner. While General Assembly resolutions are not binding, this one rallied broad support. Tremendous progress towards the goals has been made globally. For example, the proportion of people who live on less than \$1 a day fell globally from nearly a third to less than a fifth between 1990 (the base year for measuring progress towards the MDGs) and 2004. Under current economic trends, the world is on track to meet the goal of reducing poverty by half by 2015. This will be a monumental achievement.

¶7. However, the UN has taken an unproductive tack by issuing reports on its Road Map for the MDGs that monitor whether states appear to be "on track" or "off track" to complete them. This has had the effect of making developing states defensive about their progress or lack thereof, and is the basis for arguments that more official development assistance (ODA) is the only way to meet the goals. Increasing ODA, while undoubtedly useful in particular circumstances, may be counter-productive in some environments, is not sustainable, and will not solve the economic growth problems faced by many developing states.

¶8. In a recent debate at the UN on the MDGs, USAID Administrator and Director of Foreign Assistance Henrietta Fore delivered a speech that explained the U.S. approach toward the MDGs. In providing MDG-related assistance, as we do with other bilateral and multilateral development assistance, we work with other donors and partner countries and stress the importance of (a) host country ownership of the process and good governance, (b) pro-growth economic policies, (c) investing in people, through health, education and other programs, and (d) addressing fragile and failing states, which need special assistance (not just more ODA) to achieve the MDGs.

¶9. While the U.S. does not endorse the numbered MDG framework set up by the UN, or the addition of so-called "targets" or "performance indicators," we strongly support the original goals set out in the Millennium Declaration and are working hard to achieve them globally. For more information about our programs, please see para. 13. The U.S. is the largest donor of bilateral official development assistance in the world. Our programs on reducing the spread of infectious diseases are the most comprehensive in history. We have a great development story to tell and we want to spread a positive message on the importance of development.

¶10. Not all states endorse the UN Road Map for the MDGs, yet it is not uncommon to see claims by UN System or other organizations that the Road Map MDGs have been endorsed by the UN. For example, a recent UN resolution stated: "Noting that full and productive employment and decent work for all have been adopted as a new target under the Millennium Development Goal 1". There is no mention of 'full and productive employment and decent work for all' in the Millennium Declaration. The UN modified its Road Map in January 2008 to draw in this goal from the World Summit Outcome Document and make it into a time-bound MDG target. The change was not negotiated by member states,

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nor endorsed -- states only "took note" of the change. Posts that encounter references to the MDGs (including in documents handled by multilateral development banks, the African Union, Organization of American States, and other multilateral or regional institutions) should be wary of claims that its contents have been "endorsed" by the UN or its member states. In such cases, please check with IO/EDA (contact information in para. 13).

Key Points in Discussing the MDGs

¶11. On an if-raised basis, Post should draw upon the following guidance when discussing the MDGs and can find additional points by visiting the website for the Office of Economic and Development Affairs in the State Department International Organization Affairs Bureau (IO/EDA) for expanded "megatalkers" on the MDGs (see para. 13).

¶12. USUN is instructed to draw on the following points in all UN System fora:

-- We strongly support the original goals set out in the Millennium Declaration and are working hard to achieve them globally, including by helping countries work to achieve them.

-- It is important to have a positive outlook on the MDGs, and focus on what works, that is, what countries are doing to achieve their development goals. Some countries are

having more difficulty than others in reaching their MDGs. They can learn from the successes of others.

-- Developing countries face different challenges and have different priorities, so not everyone is committed to meeting each goal. Countries are free to choose their own set or mix of MDGs, and the U.S. partners with countries to help them achieve their development goals.

-- It is essential the each country take ownership of its development goals and have its own national strategy to achieve them.

-- We also have found that states promoting good governance, enabling the private sector, removing constraints to growth, and developing public-private partnerships tend to have better success in reaching and sustaining their development goals.

-- Economic growth is the engine that will enable countries to achieve and sustain the MDGs.

-- The MDGs can be an effective tool to promote action and stimulate development efforts around shared objectives. While there are many aspirational goals states have adopted in the UN, we believe it is important to keep discussion of the MDGs focused on the core goals of reducing poverty and hunger, improving health and education and combating major diseases. Expanding the MDGs risks losing our focus and the shared consensus that binds us together in action.

FRAGILE STATES

-- Fragile and failing states -- characterized by weak institutional capacities, poor governance, political instability, internal conflict and large numbers of their people living in extreme poverty -- are the states least likely to achieve the MDGs.

-- The U.S. has supported multilateral efforts to improve our tools of engagement to help fragile and failing states achieve the MDGs. We need to continue efforts to improve these and other tools.

ECONOMIC GROWTH/POVERTY REDUCTION

-- The world has made substantial progress toward the goal of reducing poverty and hunger. Countries that have grown rapidly have, with few exceptions, made rapid progress in reducing poverty. Those that have failed to sustain significant growth in per-capita incomes have made slow progress in reducing poverty, or have suffered increased rates of poverty.

-- The end of armed conflict played an essential role in setting the stage for some of today's African success stories. Africa has achieved accelerated growth in agriculture which is the main source of employment for

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nearly two-thirds of all Africans, and an even larger source of employment to Africa's poor.

-- Sustaining and accelerating agricultural growth in Africa will require further policy improvements including the removal of barriers to internal and international trade, increased competition in domestic input markets, and improvements in the security of land tenure.

-- To increase growth in agriculture, states must increase investment in infrastructure -- such as rural roads and transnational links, including in land-locked countries -- and substantially expand irrigation where water resources are available.

-- Improved agricultural technology also offers essential means to help farmers in Africa and other tropical regions adjust to climate change.

MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORPORATION (MCC)

-- The MCC's mission is to reduce poverty through economic growth, the first of the internationally agreed MDGs, which lays a foundation for partner country efforts to meet all the MDGs in a sustainable way.

-- The MCC works only with countries that perform relatively well in terms of good governance, economic freedom and investments in people. Partner countries are responsible for identifying the greatest barriers to their own development and then developing and implementing their own programs.

EDUCATION

-- Universal primary education is a development benchmark which can be reached through multiple routes. As a country's mean level of education increases net enrollment rates in primary education will concomitantly increase.

-- However, solely focusing on "children" and "primary education" will not produce the mix of skills needed for development, nor will it likely be sustainable. Primary education must be accompanied by a focus on learning outcomes and complemented with other measures such as adult literacy.

HEALTH

-- The U.S. coordinates global health assistance in three ways: high level coordination between U.S. and host-government partners, global leadership in private sector engagement, and strategic coordination of support in services in country-specific programs. (NOTE: Please see the IO/EDA Website for interagency talking points on extensive U.S. assistance programs on maternal and child health, malaria, tuberculosis, neglected tropical diseases and HIV/AIDS.)

MDG Website

¶13. The IO/EDA Office invites you to visit its website with reference products on the MDGs:

<http://io.state.gov/index.cfm?fuseaction=public.display&shorcut=47J4>

On this website you will find links to resources referenced above:

-- the USG approach to development and the MDGs (para. 1);
-- the latest version of the MDG 'Road Map' (para. 3); and
-- Henrietta H. Fore's speech at the UN on the U.S. approach the MDGs (para. 8),

as well as links to:

-- an "MDGs for Dummies" tutorial in Power Point,
-- a published booklet on the MDGs prepared for the recent UN Event (in color, .pdf format), and
-- past cables on the MDGs.

We encourage all interested posts to contact IO/EDA staff Laura de Otalvaro (deOtalvaroLH@state.gov, 202-647-1307) or Andrew Haviland (HavilandAB@state.gov, 202-647-1545) for guidance as questions arise, or send an e-mail to the e-mail list "IO-MDGs-DL".

¶14. Minimize considered.
RICE